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ABSTRACT

This study evaluated the Spouses of International Students and Scholars (SISS) program at the University of Montana in Missoula, an orientation program designed to meet the adjustment and English-as-a-second-language needs of women from several countries. Twelve women from six different countries (China, Hong Kong, Japan, Korea, Nepal, and Taiwan) who were regular participants in the program completed interviews, and nine of the participants completed evaluative questionnaires concerning the program. Participant observation was used to gather additional data during the eight-month program. The results were organized into three different perspectives that reflected the women's views of living abroad. Perspective 1 focused on the fact that travel was necessary to accompany the husband; women with this perspective were initially the least enthused to be in the United States. Perspective 2 focused on the fact that travel was important to the growth of the male scholar and the female spouse; women in this group reported that they enjoyed being in Missoula. Perspective 3 focused on the fact that travel is a novelty and can be used to promote self-learning; women in this group proved to be the most self-sufficient and independent. (Contains 12 references.) (MDM)

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A Model Community Program to Acclimate Spouses of International University Students

by

Patchechole Ojo

Paper presented at a roundtable session of the International Meeting of ASHE – The Association for the Study of Higher Education, held in Miami, Florida, November 4-5, 1998

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This paper was presented at the annual meeting of the Association for the Study of Higher Education held in Miami, Florida, November 5-8, 1998. This paper was reviewed by ASHE and was judged to be of high quality and of interest to others concerned with higher education. It has therefore been selected to be included in the ERIC collection of ASHE conference papers.

A Model Community Program to Acclimate

Spouses of International University Students

In the summer of 1997 a group of women founded The Spouses of International Students and Scholars Program (also known as SISS) in Missoula, Montana. Its mission was to enhance the sojourn of the spouses of international scholars at The University of Montana. The founders sought to design a community-based, non-formal, year-long program based on adult learning theories that could meet the adjustment and ESL needs of women from several countries outside the United States.

This paper is a study of that program and its contribution to our understanding of the nature of international women's adaptation in the United States. It begins with an overview of the program and its guiding principles. It then takes a closer look at these principles, developing more fully the connection between certain feminist and adult learning theories and the practical aspects of a program for women who desire to practice English and adjust quickly to their new environment. The main theories undergirding this study were feminist theories of identity and intellectual adjustment and adult learning theories of situated learning and critical thinking. In the third section the qualitative methodology is explicated, followed by a fourth section which describes the research findings. The last two sections discuss implications for theory and other conclusions based on the data.

A study of the design, implementation and philosophy of a program like SISS allows us to examine the applicability of certain adult learning theories in a non-formal setting. Can the American educators' presumptions that adults want to be more directly involved in their own educational process be equally applied to adults from outside the United States? Does the

American feminist ideology that holds that only after women have developed a connected and caring relationship with their environment can learning (or true participation) occur, also apply to spouses not involved in a formal academic program? The answers to these and other questions may be found through studying the Missoula SISS Program.

THE SPOUSES OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS AND SCHOLARS PROGRAM: AN OVERVIEW

The University of Montana is the flagship public university in the largely rural and underpopulated state of Montana (approximately 800,000 residents) in the northwest United States. Around 12,000 students, undergraduate and graduate, attend the university, with the international student population averaging around 375. The main campus is located in Missoula, a city of about 60,000 residents.

Graduate students, research fellows, and visiting professors come from all over the world to participate in opportunities in the Missoula area. The University offers exceptional opportunities through the World Trade Center of the Business School, the Mansfield Center for Asian Studies, the internationally renown Forestry School with emphases in wildlife biology and tourism/recreation, as well as the many pursuits in the traditional scientific, social science, humanistic, and fine and performing arts curricula. There is also a strong English Language Institute on campus. One example of an off-campus organization that attracts specialists and researchers from many countries is the International Heart Institute, affiliated with St. Patrick's Hospital. Despite the relatively small size of the university and the surrounding town, Missoula holds many scholarly and intellectual pursuits for scholars, educators, researchers and practitioners from around the world.

Several years ago the international community at The University of Montana was surveyed to identify their needs and level of satisfaction with their local experience (Gehl, 1995). One unanswered need has been to alleviate poor adjustment of accompanying spouses. It was determined that spouses who remain lonely and do not adjust well often cause a hardship for the scholars, sometimes even to the point of affecting the latters' academic achievement. Several people, both on campus and off, discussed this issue and, with the cooperation of the University's Director of Foreign Student and Scholar Services, decided to inaugurate a program to attempt to meet the needs of the spouses of international scholars. The Director of the Jeannette Rankin Peace Resource Center, a nonprofit organization whose mission is to educate people about various global issues, obtained a grant from NAFSA-The Association of International Educators, a national organization, and became one of the founding members of the program. Two other women joined her as founders and organizers: a community member who has long held a deep-rooted interest in multi-cultural and international affairs, and the author of this paper, a visiting instructor at the University with experience teaching in Nigeria.

The Missoula, Montana program, housed off-campus (in the International House), is basically run and supported by the local community of Missoula, with logistical support from the University. A second community organization which has been very instrumental, in addition to the Jeannette Rankin Center, is the Missoula International Friendship Program (MIFP). This nonprofit organization has been providing hospitality families to international students for years. Together these two community groups have access to many individuals anxious to meet and work with people from diverse countries. SISS was created to provide opportunities for the spouses to meet other women like themselves, and for them to interact with Americans who can assist them

in becoming acclimatized to the community and who can help them develop their English-speaking skills in an informal, non-threatening environment. For the first year, all the spouses were women, so the program was geared toward women. The organizers plan on being flexible enough to accommodate the needs of husbands or adult siblings in the future if so warranted.

GUIDING PHILOSOPHICAL PRINCIPLES

The organizers of the program were greatly influenced by theories of gender, power and language. First, they wanted to explore to what extent theories of identity and intellectual adjustment of women, such as those espoused by Mary Belenky and her colleagues in 1986, could be applied to women of different nationalities. They were also curious about whether certain adult learning theories could be applied in this patently non-formal learning situation. Second, Freire had established two decades ago that oppressed people could use education as a tool of empowerment; it was not clear initially whether international spouses were cognizant of, or even interested in, their level of power (or lack thereof), but they seemed an appropriate group to assign Freire's principles to. Third, educators of adults have believed adults want to be more directly involved in their own educational process (Caffarella, 1993; Cross, 1981; Tough, 1979). As will be seen, this was the case with the international women when they expressed their desire to have more opportunities to perfect their English.

Theories of Identity and Intellectual Adjustment

Carol Gilligan (1982) determined that many women develop their self-concept through relationships founded on caring for and about others. Building on this premise, the SISS program sought to provide opportunities for the spouses to develop a sense of connection in this unfamiliar environment by learning to care about and share with other women in situations similar to theirs.

It was postulated that the alienation and isolation experienced by spouses from earlier years could be lessened this year if the spouses were brought together in a variety of events, formal and informal, structured and unstructured, that comprised a core group of the same people but also included new faces from time to time. It was hoped that the spouses would quickly begin to build a sense of connection to one another, and begin to relate to American friends who may have seemed "strange" to them at first.

Mary Belenky and her colleagues (1986) understood that an individual's self-concept, or 'voice' as they put it, begins to blossom only after that individual feels she has something to express, and is capable of expressing it. This confidence is also developed after a sense of connection has been established. Through SISS, it was hoped that the spouses would inquire about things on their minds, use their own voice to express their needs or interests, and after participating in meaningful dialogue with Americans and other international women begin to feel less estranged and more connected to this town. Thus the SISS organizers relied heavily on feminist theories of identity and intellectual development to promote identity and intellectual adjustment among the international spouses.

Adult Education Theories of Situated Learning and Critical Thinking

The participants did not come to this program seeking a formal educational experience. Indeed, several of them were simultaneously enrolled in adult education courses that taught English-as-a-second-language, and were satisfied with that class. A few of the women had already completed terminal degrees back home and were not looking for more schooling. Many of them also felt that they were getting a high enough dose of "education" by helping their husbands, even if it was simply typing their papers or listening to them prepare their seminar lectures. To the

women, SISS was not regarded as a substitute for a formal 'school.' Rather, as one said, "SISS is a good way to meet people and have fun." Their purpose in attending the program was to learn about Missoula in an informal way, get to know people, and practice their English speaking and listening skills informally (without being graded, or through doing homework).

The organizers valued the opportunity to provide an educational experience cloaked as "fun" and "sharing." According to situated learning theories (e.g. Caffarella, 1993 and Dirkx & Prenger, 1997), one of the best ways of doing so was to get the women directly involved in the educational/learning process by utilizing activities, events and information they needed, wanted or were already familiar with. The program sought to offer opportunities for the participants to explore their own ways of thinking and doing, and learn to share these with American counterparts. At the same time they would be developing their own voice in a new cultural environment, perhaps even becoming empowered in ways they had not thought of before. The idea of women's empowerment, particularly through collaboration and cooperation, was especially appealing.

This belief in empowerment was perhaps felt to be appropriate for international women since it is the linchpin of Paulo Freire's earlier work in Brazil. The political situation in 1997 Montana was radically different, nevertheless Freire's strong belief that critical educational practices empower students in their learning and their ability to adjust to their environment remained relevant. By participating in SISS the international spouses in Missoula could take steps to eliminate their own lack of power at negotiating and maneuvering in a new environment among strange people.

Adult education theories that stipulate that adults learn best in self-directed and non-threatening environments (e.g. Tough, 1979; Cross, 1981; and Caffarella, 1993) were another strong motivating factor behind the program. It was decided that a student-centered set of activities emanating from the participants' own life experiences and interests would be appreciated the most, after hearing from women like our Japanese friend who said, "I am so glad you asked us what we wanted to learn. I have been dying to cook steak like you do!" They made it clear they were not here to obtain a degree, or to be told what to learn and how to adjust. So by first finding out what their expressed needs were, and then using their experiences, personalities and wishes to develop activities and learning opportunities, SISS turned out to be more fun and more meaningful in the long run than some of the more formal educational settings many of them were also involved in. The idea of student-centered learning in real-life situations appealed to the organizers and apparently appealed to the participants. The rationale for the theoretical bases for this program thus emerged from these two perspectives, the critical-feminist perspective and self-directed student-centered learning theories.

Empowerment Through Language: Learning English-as-a-Second-Language

A third basis for the program developed as the year progressed. Even though the focus was not on "teaching" English language skills, there was a high degree of awareness that "learning" was going on. This was done primarily through discussion of American culture and jokes about phonology and vocabulary, activities recognized by Kaplan (1984) as *bonafide* English learning strategies. The Adult Basic Literacy Educators Network (ABLE) has outlined ways of integrating what they call "life and process skills and competencies" in informal arrangements. These skills and competencies include the following:

- **basic skills** such as reading, writing, listening and speaking;
- **thinking skills** such as decision-making, problem-solving and reasoning;
- **use of information** through acquiring and evaluating, then interpreting and communicating information;
- **interpersonal skills** such as teaching others, exercising leadership, and working with cultural diversity; and
- **personal qualities** such as responsibility, self-esteem, sociability, and integrity and honesty (Dirkx & Prenger, 1997, pp. 132-138).

The informal SISS program touched upon the development of basic skills in listening, speaking and writing, and in the other major competencies listed above. So while the women were gaining confidence through building relationships, and while they were learning how to maneuver in new surroundings, they were also becoming competent in personal ways such as expressing personal needs in a new language.

METHODOLOGY

The intent of this study was to examine one program which sought to promote the social adjustment of the spouses of international scholars. As a descriptive study, the chosen research methodology is a combination of qualitative ethnography and the case study method. The rationale behind this was outlined by Tinto & Goodsell (1993) who appealed for interpretive approaches to understanding how one can implement a similar program. Bogdan & Biklen (1992) also supported the use of qualitative approaches for research in education.

The Research Questions

What specific factors assisted participants in developing familiarity with their new environment?

Is it advantageous for the participants to quickly develop friendships with other international women as well as Americans?

Can an informal program assist participants in feeling comfortable with the English language within a few months?

Programs with similar goals may have been developed in other cities; is there anything special about this program that others may want to emulate?

The answers to these questions will be discussed in the section on "FINDINGS."

Respondents

Interviews were held with the women who were initially invited to be participants in the program according to the list provided by the Director of Foreign Student and Scholar Services at The University of Montana. The program began in September 1997 and was active through May 1998. Some of the women dropped out over the course of the year, for various reasons, and their insights were also sought where possible. The 12 consistent participants were from Hong Kong of China, Japan, Korea, Nepal, The People's Republic of China, and Taiwan.

Data Collection

Participant observations occurred throughout the year. Informal discussions or interviews were held with most of the spouses at various times, and responses from 13 participants (11 regulars and two who eventually "dropped out") were documented. Nine women supplied brief written answers to a formal, written evaluative questionnaire near the end of the program. Comments from community presenters and the final report of the organizing committee to NAFSA were additional valuable resources. A journal of thoughts and observations maintained by this researcher completed the data collection process.

Coded perspectives were developed from the personal interviews and written questionnaires. These codes were then analyzed and grouped together to visualize emerging themes and to build two or three hypotheses. This system was utilized because it has been encouraged, and successfully exploited, by noted scholars (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992; Tinto & Goodsell, 1993). According to Vincent Tinto, "the process of incorporating emerging themes from the data with hypotheses constructed during the study is characteristic of inductive analysis used in qualitative research" (Tinto & Goodsell, 1993, p. 6).

Eventually the results were organized into three main perspectives which reflect the women's views on living abroad. Perspective One states that travel was necessary in order to accompany the husband. These women were the least enthused to be in the United States initially. This group included those who stopped attending. Perspective Two reveals travel is important to growth of both the male scholar and the female spouse. These women usually said they enjoyed being in Missoula. Perspective Three allows for the attitude that travel is a novelty and can be used to promote self-learning. The women in this group proved to be the most self-sufficient and independent by year's end.

Another common thread that emerged was the desire to learn or improve spoken English. This desire corroborates the theory of public and private voice (Rodriguez, 1982), the desire to be able to speak acceptably in public places. Since the spouses were not on this sojourn to acquire an academic degree or pursue research, they had hoped to perfect their English. This desire was brought on both by the need to avoid feelings of isolation from others around them, and to build their own self-worth so that when they returned home they could show they, too, had gained from the sojourn.

Data Analysis

Coded perspectives were developed from the personal interviews and written questionnaires. These codes were then analyzed and grouped together to visualize emerging themes and to build two or three hypotheses. This system was utilized because it has been encouraged, and successfully exploited, by noted scholars (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992; Tinto & Goodsell, 1993). According to Vincent Tinto, "the process of incorporating emerging themes from the data with hypotheses constructed during the study is characteristic of inductive analysis used in qualitative research" (Tinto & Goodsell, 1993, p. 6).

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their own self-worth so that when they returned home they could show they, too, had gained from the sojourn.

The final outcome of the interviews was that the women who stayed in the program were particularly anxious to share what knowledge they had about their home and their professional fields. This desire was less evident in the women who did not participate regularly and who did not last in the program. The reason cited by one of the women who stopped coming was, "Since I was pregnant, I wanted to stay at home. I did not want to go out and talk that much." However, the organizers strove to make the women who persisted feel they both benefitted from as well as contributed to the program.

FINDINGS

A Brief Description

As was mentioned earlier, the program lasted eight months. The initial goals were twofold: to quickly acclimate the voluntary participants to the city of Missoula, and to provide informal opportunities to hear and speak English. Over the course of the program, a third goal evolved, to develop leadership skills in the women. These three goals were effected through a combination of biweekly activities in the International House and beyond in the greater community. The activities at the I-House ranged from speakers informing the spouses about American ways of shopping, preparing food, and serving nutritionally balanced meals; to hands-on activities such a bead-making or taking care of one's dry skin; to discussions about preparing for "the other side of winter" based on a video produced by Joycee Dozier, a local resident. This video is used by colleges around the country, and is available through the NAFSA association. Other activities allowed the women to showcase their talent and knowledge, about holidays,

children's activities, cooking, etc. Off site, SISS went on field trips locally and to nearby towns. The program provided opportunities for the women to see, hear, and do. Twice a year – at Christmas and in May – a potluck or barbecue took place to involve everyone's entire family.

Answers to Research Questions

Overall, the program was a success both for the spouses who participated and for the community that embraced them. The organizers made preparations for a few specific activities with particular objectives, but by remaining flexible were able to incorporate new activities as voiced by the needs and concerns of the spouses themselves over the course of the term. The answers to the questions below came from a variety of sources.

Research Question 1.

According to gathered data, there were three factors which assisted participants the most. Women of Perspective One tended to focus on learning about various aspects of the community. They expressed concern about or interest in aspects such as shopping, the physical layout of the city, explanations of the elementary school system and its expectations, etc. As one spouse from China put it, "Your school system is so different from ours. I thought my 6-year-old was not doing serious work. But the women explained the system and I understood better." They especially appreciated the fact that SISS was able to help them soon upon arrival and in an organized manner.

The women with Perspective Two felt the opportunity to practice English in a non-threatening environment was the most helpful aspect of the program. Several women felt they would not have voluntarily spoken at all if SISS had not been a comfortable place to try out this

new, awkward language. Two women echoed the following statement: "I did not speak English before coming to America. [The Willard School] is good. But you are helping a lot."

Women who held Perspective Three generally appreciated being looked upon as a resource. They felt the program encouraged them and even expected them to share their knowledge with Americans and other visitors. As one spouse put it, "I kept coming to the program because you asked us questions about the way we do things, too. This made me think about comparing the two ways." Developing and expanding upon their leadership abilities was considered a definite plus.

Research Question 2.

To the survey question, "Did you want to meet other international women?" 90 percent of them answered that they were delighted to meet others in situations like their own. Only one regular participant said that, at the beginning, she did not want to interact only with other foreign women, for she had come to America to learn about Americans. She was a Perspective Three, highly independent. One of the respondents who "dropped out" indicated that her main reason for leaving the group was fear of knowing only other international women. When she stated "I was afraid to become too close to only foreign women," she was expressing the attitude that she feared isolation or recognition solely as 'one of those foreigners' when she truly wanted to be accepted by American society. Fortunately, the Spouses Program provided enough interaction with Americans that by the end of the season all of the regular participants were grateful to have developed friendships with other international women.

Research Question 3.

The Spouses of International Students and Scholars Program did not emphasize the English-as-a-second-language component as much as it could have. A recommendation for future programming, and for others undertaking such a program, would be to include this as an integral part from the beginning. When the women were first interrogated about their interest in joining, 85 percent of them indicated they were already taking English classes at the Willard Adult Basic Education School. In fact, several of them were in the same classes. So the organizers mistakenly believed learning English was not a priority, only a bonus. Nevertheless, when asked what they got most out of the program, seven out of 12 mentioned practicing English as the first advantage. When pressed, they explained they felt comfortable talking with the group, and may have felt encouraged to speak out without fear of being corrected. Some sentiments expressed were: "Nobody laughed at my accent." "At Willard School, I only learned what was on my homework. Here, I learned so many things, like beading, and winter clothes."

Not only was their vocabulary broadened, thus perhaps giving them confidence in speaking, but also their listening skills increased because they were exposed to people with different accents who spoke at different paces. In some of the sessions, such as the bead-making one, they were given directions which they had to follow correctly in order to accomplish the goal of creating beads for jewelry. A lot of laugher, helping one another, and teasing ensued.

Overall, they enjoyed the informality of SISS, feeling they could participate as much or as little as they chose to. They willingly participated verbally, perhaps, as one stated, "because I was with friends, and not teacher." By the end of the first year, only one spouse was still hesitant about speaking. She said, "I understand everything, I just can't speak good." Actually, she did speak quite well, albeit slowly, but she chose not to speak much. Interestingly, there were no

noticeable differences according to the three Perspectives among the answers to the questions related to the level of comfort with English.

Research Question 4.

The SISS Program did what many programs for international visitors do, and that is provide social and informational activities. The findings from the study revealed that there were three distinctive features about the Missoula program for spouses, features which were defined by the three Perspectives. The Perspective One people tended to indicate awareness that the activities were all directed, sponsored or supported by diverse members of the community, and not the University. Perspective Three were excited by the realization that the activities could afford leadership development opportunities. Perspective Two appreciated the activities that provided a way of practicing English skills in non-didactic ways.

4a) Community Participation as a Benefit of the Program. Women who belonged to the Perspective One group commented more than the others about the community participation. The major community organization was the Jeannette Rankin Peace Resource Center, a nonprofit organization working for world peace and social justice through action and education projects that promote tolerance and an understanding of diversity. Most of the Center's activities involve international people directly, as speakers or presenters, and the spouses were always apprised of the Center's activities and invited to observe or participate. The Center also runs the Global Village World Craft Shop, a project that features fairly-traded non-exploitative crafts from cooperatives around the world, crafts made by families working to achieve self-sufficiency. The Shop is staffed by volunteers, and several spouses often volunteered time working in the Shop or

the Center library. In fact, the idea of volunteering was very appealing to the spouse from Nepal, who on her own also began to volunteer at the Food Bank and at the local hospital.

The other major community organization working with SISS was MIFP, the Missoula International Friendship Program. MIFP's goal is to increase opportunities for intercultural awareness on the part of both Americans and international students through shared programs and activities done through homes, and not other institutions such as church or school. MIFP did *not* provide host families for SISS spouses, but they did use their community connections to bring presenters to the meetings and to network spouses within the community. The programs which received the greatest praise from the women were conducted by:

- a noted naturalist and bird-watcher
- a talented jewelry crafter
- a professional nutritionist
- a Mary Kay skin care specialist
- and the NAFSA Region II COMSEC representative.

The participation of these two community groups allowed several Missoulians to share their talents and expertise with SISS; at the same time, these same Missoulians were beginning to develop lasting friendships with the international women, something that was mentioned by all the respondents with Perspective One.

Several women echoed the sentiment expressed when one participant said, "In Japan, most people are the same. I thought it is interesting to know people who are different getting along." They appreciated having the opportunity to meet and personally get to know people from a wide variety of backgrounds. Not only did they enjoy meeting women who shared their talents ranging from bird-watching to skin care, but they found it particularly fascinating that the women were not all of one ethnic and socio-economic status. As one respondent remarked, "I never thought to

know a Hawaiian except I go to Hawaii!" At the SISS meetings, the women got to make friends with women of Hawaiian, Euro-American, African-American, Greek-American and Ghanaian descent. Another respondent stated, "It was nice to know ... [Black Americans] because I did not know any before coming." There was not a big deal made about the ethnic backgrounds of people, other than to mention it, but it became clear early on to the spouses that the ethnically diverse presenters were valuable and valued members of the community. The ones who commented on the aspect of diversity of presenters said they had not thought about it much before coming, but were glad to see it for themselves.

4b) Leadership Development as a Program Benefit One of the women in the Perspective Three group exclaimed: "Back home, I never directed a group of women before. Here, it was fun. You gave me the chance!" All the women in this group appreciated SISS's encouraging leadership development opportunities for the spouses. Even though the organizers discussed on a weekly basis among themselves the types of activities to be offered, they began involving one or two spouses in the decisions, plans, and wherever possible implementation. One spouse helped organize and develop the cookbook which was sold at the University's International Festival; this was the first time she had "directed a group of women" and learned a lot in the process. The cookbook was a great success at the Festival.

Another spouse began to develop her leadership potential when she attended the organizers' planning sessions on a regular basis in the second semester. She was invited because she had time to commit (no small children at home like many of the other spouses) and seemed genuinely interested at all the meetings. She stated, "I am so happy to part of the organizers now!" In determining to what degree she utilized her leadership and organizational skills, she

answered: "I see many of the women all of the time. We talk about activities to do, ones they enjoy or that they hear about. And I call everybody. I remind them to come to the next meeting." From her informal interactions with the women outside of the bi-weekly meetings, she came up with a couple of suggestions. One was to visit a nearby Native American reservation. Unfortunately, that activity fell through in the first year, but is in the plans for year two. Such suggestions and assistance were welcome, and it is a hope of the organizers that, if a spouse remains in the Missoula area for more than one year, SISS will be able to include her as one of the permanent organizers for the second year. Her leadership would give a new flavor to the program, and should prove extremely beneficial for all concerned.

4 c) The Benefit of Practicing English-speaking Skills. The women with Perspective Two mentioned more than the others how much they got out of practicing their language skills. The woman who said, "I was very shy to speak English. My pronunciation was not strong," never stopped trying to participate.

Many people who find themselves communicating in a foreign language for the first time feel timid and awkward. This was the case even for the spouses who understood English very well. The program sought to do two things: reassure the spouses that they would be able to speak in due time; and try to explain why the English they were hearing was not necessarily the English they had been taught in school. There were a lot of jokes about regional dialects, with one local town getting the brunt of them. The story goes that at one time there were more Irish in that town than in all of Ireland! The spouses visited this special place on St. Patrick's Day to see for themselves, and gained additional exposure to the diversity of ethnic cultures in the United States.

A couple of the women commented about the different ways presenters spoke. The variety of speakers exposed them to several American-English dialect accents and vocabulary variations. The speakers also gave them the opportunity to hone listening skills, for some speakers recounted incidents and stories, others provided information, still others gave directions which the women had to follow. Many participants indicated they came to realize there was more than one "English."

The spouses talked about how they were always encouraged to talk. They were asked to share what they or their family had done the previous week. Every week different people prepared a snack or simple dish, and when they brought the dish they explained how it was made, its ingredients, and the differences between the dish made in America and the one made back home. On a couple of occasions they were asked to prepare a talk about their country, their profession back home, or on some other topic. This was particularly useful for the women who were invited to speak in local schools about their home country and customs, for it gave them a chance to practice, and to receive helpful tips.

There was not as much reading or writing as there could have been. Future programs should make more of an effort to include these skills in a more directed activity. When spouses were asked to write, such as for the cookbook or in completing the evaluation questionnaire, assistance was freely given, so they never really practiced writing on their own.

It was interesting to note the breakdown of the women's responses grouped under Research Question 4, which dealt with distinctive or special features of SISS. The three distinctive features were clearly the level of community participation, the chance to develop leadership skills, and a non-threatening environment for practicing English language skills.

IMPLICATIONS FOR THEORY

This study of SISS demonstrates that adult learning theories, especially critical and feminist theories, can be applied, with few reservations, in programs destined for individuals who are not Americans. The women in the SISS program indicated they successfully adapted to their new surroundings. Their husbands reported minimal homesickness on the part of their spouses and little or no disruptions of the husband's academic progress. The results of this study suggest that the SISS program probably contributed to the women's easy and rapid adjustment. First, they made friends of other women in situations similar to theirs, and they made friends with several American women. Second, they learned a lot about American culture and habits in a short period of time. As one of the spouses said, "Holidays like your Hallowe'en did not seem so strange. After you explained the custom to us." They also learned how to navigate in the community, through activities such as going in groups to the Farmer's Market, and hearing from a nutritionist about how to prepare meals with ingredients found in local supermarkets.

As Belenky and colleagues (1986) surmised, the "kinds of relationships that provide women with experiences of mutuality, equality, and reciprocity" (p. 38) enable women to gain a sense of their own capacity for coping in strange environments. In providing the "pluralistic and intellectually challenging environment" (p. 45) which Belenky and colleagues recommend, SISS demonstrated how individuals in a complex, pluralistic society are able to adapt.

The women who remained with the program probably did so because, as Tough (1979) stated about adult learners, they were 'internally-motivated.' One of the motivations may have come from the satisfaction of showing themselves more independent to their spouses, as one respondent indicated. An example of this is one spouse from Japan who became an entrepreneur

and sold Sushi in the Farmer's Market. Her network developed through SISS allowed her to gain the confidence and support to embark on her successful business.

Another reason the women may have stayed with the program is that it encouraged dialogue on several topical issues. It was never a one-way street, with the spouses always on the receiving end only. The sessions were designed to focus on the social context of their living environment to facilitate, as Freire says, critical reflection leading to empowerment for change. In this case, the change was within the women themselves, creating conditions which allowed them to develop their own potential for coping and adjusting. This change, or empowerment, may have come about as the women exchanged views in welcomed dialogue such that each woman could be understood in her own terms. As Freire pointed out, the activities thus became much more meaningful.

CONCLUSIONS

This study is significant from the theoretical perspective in that it demonstrates the viability of applying adult education concepts – particularly critical-feminist ones and situated learning – in a situation geared toward international women who are not American. Because the population under study is small, the results cannot be generalized. As the study is primarily descriptive, rather than evaluative, it cannot be taken as a test of the theories mentioned. However, it is valuable to recognize the success in this instance, thereby encouraging others to duplicate its achievement.

In terms of practical application, the study's significance relates to the value of the type of program offered for international spouses. Fears and concerns expressed by these women initially and by earlier spouses who did not have the benefit of this program, revolved around issues of

isolation, unfamiliarity with American ways of doing things, and skepticism about certain American realities as reported by third parties (racism, xenophobia, high tech society, crime). A commonly-held belief by most participants, American as well as foreign, was that the program's success owed more to the variety of individuals who presented talks or activities that it did to the actual programmatic content of each session. Interaction with different American ethnic groups helped explain and relieve fears associated with American racism and xenophobia.

The program was successful because it was community-led. The University served as resource, but the activities, ideas, and interactions were all done in the community of Missoula. One of the greatest benefits to the participants derived from personal contact with a variety of Americans. Even living in a relatively isolated place like Missoula, the visitors came to understand and appreciate America's asset of having people from many ethnic, religious and socio-economic backgrounds all making substantive contributions to the society. The spouses were introduced to a social life apart from that which their husbands enjoyed through the university, and thus became quickly connected.

The program did not develop leadership skills in all the women, but was successful in that it allowed women who already possessed those skills to demonstrate their self-confidence and abilities. More will be done in this area when second-year spouses are available to assist more in planning and directing the program. The idea of leadership development should definitely become an integral part of such a program.

SISS did help all participants practice their English in a non-threatening, even fun environment. Minimal emphasis was placed on writing, and even less on reading; but women who were timid at the beginning were speaking up without coaxing by the end of the year. Greater

effort should be made to include all aspects of English acquisition, i.e. speaking, listening, and reading and writing, in future activities.

This small program, which served 12 women, with a very limited budget of $1000, was deemed a success by the participants and NAFSA, the sponsoring organization. Due to its efforts to provide a cordial, welcoming, nurturing environment for the spouses of students attending The University of Montana, the program allowed the women to become acclimated, and familiar with a broader spectrum of activities associated with the town, more quickly than former international visitors had been able to do. At the same time, the program also provided a boon to the community, because the women eagerly shared their knowledge about their homes, customs and beliefs and thus educated those who had not had the opportunity to visit the various countries.

Finally, in providing desired activities for the spouses of international students and scholars, members of the university and surrounding local community of Missoula themselves became more enlightened about how women from diverse countries learn to adjust, cope with challenges, and find their own place in a new environment. These aspects – community-based, exposure to a cross-section of American cultures, informal practice speaking English, and opportunities for leadership development – are the primary factors that went into this model program for the adjustment of spouses of international scholars.

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